

# Figuring out the Varieties in Reporting News with an Eye on Translation and Semiotics

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**Abstract**—Although most of the people focus on the written message and forget about other non-verbal messages, some researchers keep looking for other signal that might send some messages but are stronger enough to affect the readers. This research is an attempt to figure out the size of the blackout that we experience in the world concerning reporting news. The reasons behind such vagueness are the factors encompassed in delivering the news such as the translator's viewpoint and signs translation. The semiotic approach has been used to shed light on these elements and to raise the attention of readers before taking every little news guaranteed.

**Keywords**—News, Politics, Semiotics, Signs, Translation, Vagueness.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. What is Semiotics?

Semiotics, as its name implies, is the study on signs. From the standpoints of semiotics, all languages are a system, consisting of coherent signs. Consequently, all texts can be described and analyzed semiotically. Such being the same case, translation, based on language, is considered as compatible with semiotics in that both are concerned with “the use, interpretation, and exchange of messages or texts, --that is of signs” (Gorlée, 1994). Semiotics is the study of signs and emerged in a literary or linguistic context through the work of two theorists: The Swiss Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and the American philosopher Peirce (1839–1914). Saussure divides a sign into two components – the signifier (the sound, image, or word) and the signified (the concept the signifier represents, or the meaning). For Peirce a sign is of a triadic nature. It consists of a representamen which stands for an object, interpretant, “somebody,” and ground “some respect.” Therefore, a sign stands for something (representamen), to somebody (interpretant), and in some respect (ground) and to be able to figure out the meaning of every sign (word), we are in need of an interpretation or translation. Petrilli (n.d.) says that sign activity or semiotics is a translation process and he agrees with Peirce that signs do not exist without an interpretant and that the meaning of a sign can only be expressed by another sign acting as its interpretant, translation is constitutive of the sign.

Petrilli (2013) says that translation is not only a practice but also a method of interpretation and understanding, of investigation and discovery, verification, and acquisition of new knowledge, and as such is also a method of critique. Moreover, translation theory can also be a theory that reflects on sign and meaning. Such an approach can contribute to a better understanding of the practice of translation. That is why some researchers try to blend these two approaches into one approach called “translation semiotics.” The identity of translation semiotics as a discipline that has evolved in the contacts between translation studies and semiotics (of culture) can first be understood through mutual influences (Torop, 2008). Translation studies have already long ago turned to semiotics, and semiotics in its turn has made use of the concept of translation. Kourdis (2007) explains semiotics as a way to understand the meaning through the translation process since semiotics considers translation as a sociocultural phenomenon. Translation activity in culture cannot take place in isolation from experience of culture and technological development. The interpretation of words is affected by the speaker, the audience, and the cultural background of them both. Victoria Welby (1837-1912) describes man's capacity for signification in terms of “translative thinking.”

Translated into semiotic terms, we can say that translative thinking is a semiotic process in which something stands for something else, in which different sign systems are related, in which one sign is more fully developed, enriched, criticized, put at a distance, and in any case, and interpreted in terms of

another sign (Petrilli, 1992). Wittgensten (1989) describes the translation process as semiosis. It takes as its point of departure the (simple or complex) verbal sign (such as a word, sentence, or text) as referring to its object (or set of objects).

Tracing back the particular way in which a sign is encoded (its ground) is followed by the creation, in the mind, of an interpretant, the meaning of which is equivalent to, or more developed version, of the meaning of the first sign. He says that semiosis in the language-game of translation means that the interpreter/translator interprets and translates, in fact, his or her own interpretants. Therefore, the translator embodies the sign user or interpreter which Peirce did not include as an explicit fourth component of semiosis, in addition to the interpretant. Sutiste and Torop (2007. p. 196) talk about the translation semiotics, a discipline that, as part of semiotics, engages in comparative analysis of sign systems and functional relations between different sign systems and, as an autonomous discipline, provides the means to distinguish and discern of sign system translatability.

Kourdis (2007) makes a comparison between two advertisements in terms of translation in two different languages; Greek and English. He has focused on the semiotic role of translation in advertising. He has pinpointed that the use of English connotes a West-European *modus vivendi* encompassing style, traveling, and shopping. Especially in Greece, the use of English in the transmitted message aims to affect consumers implicitly and enticing them to adopt the whole lifestyle that is, somehow, different to their tradition and culture. Besides, he has figured out that the use of the sign system of chromatics is very important for the preservation of esthetic equivalence of the advertisement. Therefore, the translation process includes the translation of verbal and non-verbal signs taking into consideration the fact that the linguistic message occupies only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the advertisement which connotes that for the advertisers the intersemiotic translation is more important than the interlingual translation.

Gottlieb (2005) says that any kind of translation is a multi-faceted entity, and even the word "translation" covers at least two dimensions: (1) Time, including the semantics and temporal progression of the translational process and (2) space, including the semiotics and texture, or composition, of the translational product. He adds that the process of translation involves a chain of disparate and consecutive entities, ranging from the conceiver(s) of the original text, through the text itself to the receivers of the translated version of it. Even the translational product is a complex notion. As a simultaneously presented synthesis of signs constituting either a mono- or polysemiotic text, the translated text encompasses much more than the rephrasing of original verbal utterances. Even in the case of "words-only" – i.e., monosemiotic – texts, other factors than verbal semantics form part of translational products. Translation is described by Welby as "inter-translation," a method of interpretation and understanding and is related to reflection on signs and meaning (1983 [1903], p. 120). Moreover, semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign.

A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not

necessarily have to exist to be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it (Eco, 1976). The role of translation, therefore, is to find out the implied meaning and given that translative processes are structural to sign processes as they develop across systemic and typological boundaries, the question of translation from a signficant perspective is no less than structural to the theory of meaning (cited by Petrilli and August, 2007).

## II. PURPOSES UNDERLYING ANALYZING THIS SPEECH

Within the trend of the Arab spring that prevails the Arab world starting with Tunisia and ending with Syria, President Obama has delivered many speeches concerning it, especially after pretending that President Bashar Al-Assad has used chemical weapons against Syrians. The speech under scrutiny is catchy enough since it has been translated by many channels. In each one, we can notice the difference in terms of the title, the images, and the context. To figure out the reason behind these differences, I will follow the method used by Kourdis in his paper entitled with "the semiotic role of translation in advertising. The case of bilingual advertisement from a comparative aspect."

## III. THE INTERLINGUAL TRANSLATION OF THE SPEECH MESSAGE

The motivation behind devising an interlingua was the long-lived belief that while languages differ greatly in their "surface structures," they all share a common "deep structure." Hence, arose the idea of creating a universal representation capable of conveying this deep structure while enjoying the regularity and predictability natural languages lack. To be capable of representing natural language content, an interlingua should be, first, unambiguous; it should be more explicit even than the natural language it is representing (Al-Ansary, n.d). It also involves two equivalent messages in two different codes. I try to make a kind of equivalence between the source text and the target text in an attempt to increase communication efficiency (Van Kesteren as cited by Kourdis, 2007). In my research, I try to find out whether the interlingual translation increases or decreases the communication efficiency and in which way.

The first semiotic observation deals with the language which appears first. In the English version, the speech is full of pictures and the font is different which gives an impression of how much this speech is important (Abal Hassan and Alshalawi, 2000). The Arabic version, on the other hand, is quite short and no difference in the font has been noticed which reflects the marginalization in reporting news.

### A. The Interpretation of the Title of the Advertisement

The first thing to be said about the title of the English version is the use of the verb (say) which has been translated into (اوضح). The aforementioned verb cancels the option of explanation and reflects the idea that how much President Obama was brief in his speech. Besides, the deletion of

the phrase “back from the brink” in the Arabic version and the addition of (لكنه أضاف أن هدف عمل عسكري محدود سيكون ردع) (استخدام أسلحة كيميائية في المستقبل). The deletion of “Back from the brink” has the reference to the Iraqi dilemma and the chaos and disturbance that have been created after waging war against Iraq in 2003. Its deletion is due to the fact that the Arab world all know and still live the aftermath of the war against Iraq while its existence in the English version has the connotation of reminding Barak of this action to think thoroughly before doing an action that leads to loss of people and money. The addition of (لكنه أضاف أن هدف عمل) (عسكري محدود سيكون ردع استخدام أسلحة كيميائية في المستقبل) has the connotation of assuring the Arab world and showing the good intention of President Obama and how much he cares about the interest of people and his neighbors Israel, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq.

### *B. The Interpretation of the Principal Message of the Speech*

The first thing comes to our mind when we look at the translation of the principal message is that there is no quantitative equivalence between the English and the Arabic versions. The English version contains more than 100 words, while the Arabic version <70 words. The addition of some details concerning the interviewers, the channel and the position of the president indicate the importance of the interviewee and the time spent for the preparation of such an interview. Besides, it connotes the significance of the context of the speech which talks about the existence of mass destruction weapons, and possibility of waging a military war against a country has its own position in the region and the repercussions of it on the countries in the region. In addition, the report is accompanied by a picture of the President Obama and the American flag is located behind him in an attempt to show how much he is patriotic and he cares for the interest of American people. Furthermore, we see in the English version the opinions of others such as parliament, commons, and the British prime minister which indicate that the president cannot do anything alone and the democratic approach is followed in any case. Moreover, some other pictures for the demonstrations and the activists have been added to show the democracy atmosphere and the given right for the expatriates. The Arabic version, however, is brief enough and no more details concerning anything except the president and the airstrike on Syria. This briefness connotes that Arab community does not care for all these details and even the airstrike against Syria since each country in the Middle East is busy enough with arranging the interior situation of its own people and has a lot of challenges to be faced.

Concerning the pictures of activists, people might get angry once they see them since those activists cannot feel the hunger, the misery, and the lack of safety that Syrian people live unless they come to Syria and see what is going on the ground. Below are the examples of the translation of the speeches' principal message.

### *The English version*

President Obama said that he has not made a decision yet regarding a possible U.S. strike against Syria. The president said that allegations that his Syrian counterpart, Bashar al-Assad, used chemical weapons on civilian populations would factor into his calculation and he warned that Assad should be held accountable.

### *The Arabic version*

و وضع الرئيس الأمريكي أن معاقبة حكومة الرئيس الأسد لن تحل المشاكل في سوريا. بالتأكيد هذا الأمر لن يضع حداً لسقوط قتلى في صفوف المدنيين الأبرياء في سوريا. و أضاف قائلاً في مقابلة مع شبكة التليفزيون الأمريكي العامة التحرك بشكل واضح و حاسم لوقف استخدام أسلحة كيميائية في سوريا يمكن ان يكون له تأثير ايجابي على الأمن القومي على المدى الطويل.

The use of “allegations” in the English version indicates nothing has been confirmed concerning the use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Assad. It also indicates that the airstrike against Syria has not been approved. The Arabic version, however, has translated it into “تلكيدات” which reveals that the war against Syria is out of the debate.

### *C. The Translation of the Explanatory Part of the Speeches*

The main point to be discussed here is to explain any behavior seen. In these speeches, I have seen the use of apostrophes for lexical items that are not with apostrophes in the source text. For example, in the Arabic version the civil war has become “قوله الـالـبرحـال” which connotes the situation in Lebanon that took place the late seventies and beginning of eighties and how hard was it and people are still living the aftermath. The other example is “we want the Assad regime to understand that using chemical weapons on a large scale against your own people, against women, against infants, against children, you are not only breaking international norms and standards of decency, but you are also creating a situation where U.S. national interests are affected, and that needs to stop which becomes سيئ زل حضوا و ايروس يف لكاشملا لك لحت نل» دسأل سيئ زل قموكح تبقاعم فوفص يف ىلثق طوقسل ادح عضى نل رمال اذه ،ديكأتلاب ”ايروس يف ءايربال ني نيدمل ءي كيرمال نوي زفلتلا فكش عم قلابقم يف الئاق فاضاؤ ءحل سا مادختسا فقول مساحو حضوا لكش ب كرحتلا نل قماعل ىل ع يباجا ريثأت مل نوكي نأ نكمي» ايروس يف ءي واميكي ”ليوطلا ىدمل ىل ع يموقل انم

This has a reference to the point that Mr. Obama has no intention to punish his counterpart Bashar al-Assad since it will not stop the massacre against Syrians. The actions, however, must be taken to stop the use of chemical weapons since it has a direct impact on our national security.

### *D. The Translation of the Informative Part of Speeches*

The last part of the interlingual translation has to do with the translation of the speeches' informative part, which provides information on how to stop the use of chemical weapons in Syria without making any conflict in the Middle East. This action requires a hastily preparation of a military strike against Syria. Mr. Obama made it clear that the presence of a major stockpile of chemical weapons in a volatile country like Syria with known ties to terrorists



organizations could present a real threat to the U.S. The Arabic version, however, mention that

نأمل التوصل الى مرحلة انتقالية في نهاية المطاف بسوريا و نحن مستعدون للعمل مع كل العالم، الروس و الأخرين في محاولة لجمع الاطراف بهدف التوصل الى حل النزاع. و أوباما الذي عارض قبل عشر سنوات اجتياح العراق من قبل سلفه الجمهوري جورج بوش الابن الذي تخطى موافقة الامم المتحدة، رفض مسبقاً قيام اية مقارنة تاريخية. و تحدث أوباما عن مقارنة محدودة كي لا نجد انفسنا متورطين في ني نزاع طويل و عدم تكرار تجربة العراق الامر الذي يقلق الكثيرين.

These two messages differ in one point that in the English version has no place for any comparison between the Iraqi situation and the Syrian one. This comparison has a connotation that America is ready for the repercussions of waging war against Syria and the U.S. now is stronger than 10 years later. This strength comes from the assistance of Israel since its situation will be deteriorating if Assad remains in his position with some strikes against Julian which is occupied by Israel. The other non-verbal sign is the use of apostrophes which indicates how much this channel is brief enough in reporting the news. This briefness has an indication that the speech community is fed up with listening to politicians' speeches which are full of lies.

#### IV. THE INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION OF THE SPEECHES' MESSAGE

Intersemiotic translation, the interpretation of a verbal sign (the linguistic message) by means of signs of non-verbal sign system (an image), is an important type of translation in the political speech since the images are powerful in the semiotic system. It takes place from the moment when a text is transformed into a performance, that is, when it is staged. The staged or theatrical text is already, in itself, an intersemiotic translation. The difficulties in staging a text are surmounted through the new directions theater has taken, using codes of other systems, and arguing that the performances have the power to activate the imagination, in a different though not more efficient way than the written text (Diniz, n.d.). This transmutation presupposes that the source language is the text itself (the verbal language) so this study will consider the English and the Arabic versions of news as a source language and the symbolic message of the speeches as a target language. This shows the duality feature of intersemiotic translation. That is, there are two language sources with equivalent messages, English and Arabic, and there are two kinds of transmutation, one including pictures and more details and the other including no pictures and briefness.

More analytically, the principal messages of the speeches have been translated interlinguistic and intersemiotic. The English version.

President Obama said that he has not made a decision yet regarding a possible U.S. strike against Syria. The president said that allegations that his Syrian counterpart, Bashar as-Assad, used chemical weapons on civilian populations would factor into his calculation and he warned that Assad should be held accountable

Has been translated into the Arabic version:

وقال أوباما في لقاء تلفزيوني، الخميس، إن لدى إدارته تأكيدات بشأن استخدام دمشق للأسلحة الكيماوية في الهجوم الذي وقع في الغوطة بريف العاصمة قبل عدة أيام، وأدى إلى مقتل المئات و فقا لمصادر في المعارضة السورية

وأشار الرئيس الأميركي إلى أن دمشق تمتلك أكبر مخزون كيماوي في العالم، وأن الأعراف الدولية تحرم استخدام تلك النوعية من الأسلحة.

It is obvious that some of these verbal signs are translated by iconic signs only because they are part of some speeches' connotation since some of them may have other connotations. For example, the word "allegations" "تاكيدات" and "his counterpart" "دمشق" and we know that they refer to Mr. Obama's intention to strike Syria through the intersemiotic translation in comparison with the linguistic message. However, this kind of intersemiotic translation is not a one-way translation since comprehending the messages requires getting into consideration the whole context and situation. Thus, the one-way translation, verbal sign to non-verbal sign is adequate but we have to mention that other linguists insist that intersemiotic translation is not only the result of the translation of a verbal language to a non-verbal one but is also the reverse and, in addition, the translation of a non-verbal language using another non-verbal language (Kourdis, 2007).

Picturing is a system of internal codification that concerns the use of pictures. It is a way of reading based on selective signification. In this research, it is clear that there is the symbolism of pictures that allow especially for the linguistic message to be connoted through the system of pictures. As such, we can see the background of Mr. Obama which shows the flag of America that connotes the fidelity of him to his country. Another picture shows the demonstrations that prevail the U.K. protesting against the war which shows the democratic atmosphere provided by the European countries.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The research has tackled the event, which is waging war against Syria and has dealt with the way of reporting it in two different languages. It has used Obama's interview with PBS NewsHour talking about America's plans concerning Syria and its translation into Arabic Language by Nile channel to show how the translation plays an important role in deceiving people and sometimes turning the facts. The translation includes translation of verbal and non-verbal signs, and since there is no equivalence in the political message, translation can never say the same thing, but it can say almost the same thing which seems to correspond to this observation. The study comes out with the following remarks:

- Intersemiotic translation is considered ambiguous when the speakers use pictures and figures that have sociological features which affect receivers' comprehension.
- Total quantitative equivalence seems to be necessary for the translation process especially for the title, which plays an affective role on the readers.
- The fact that the linguistic message occupies a small area indicates that the intersemiotic translation is more significant than the interlingual translation.

From the above points, the study concludes that the role of interlingual translation looks to be complementary to other semiotic systems and not the most affective. The power of the non-verbal sign system, especially of the pictures, makes interlingual translation a secondary, but necessary, factor in the transmission of a political message.

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